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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8353
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHNV/AMEMBASSY MONROVIA 0358
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CJTJF HOA
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000173

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/E AND ACTING A/S CARTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - REACTION TO SHARIF'S ELECTION

REF: Nairobi 172

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The January 30 election of former Union of Islamic Courts head Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed has resulted in a wide range of reactions from a variety of parties both domestic and international. Most Somalis appear to have welcomed the new president and pledged to support him in continuing the country's reconciliation process. Most notable among those who have reacted positively are militia commanders of the former Union of the Islamic Courts (UIC), elders from the predominant Hawiye clan in Mogadishu, and privately-owned media stations in Mogadishu. As may have been expected, extremist elements wasted no time after the election in registering their disapproval. Sharif's rival, ARS-Asmara Chairman Sheikh Hasan Dahir Aweys dismissed Sharif's election, while al-Shabaab spokesman Sheikh Mukhtar Robow vowed to continue forcefully pursuing an Islamic administration for Somalia. End summary.

Positive Reactions:
A New Era, Focus
on Reconstruction

¶2. (SBU) Following the January 30 election of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as the new President of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (reftel), a series of individuals and organizations immediately spoke out in support of Sharif. The supreme council of Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) strongly welcomed Sharif's election. During a January 31 news conference at a Mogadishu hotel, ASWJ spokesman Sheikh Abdiqadir Sheikh Abukar Sheikh Muhammad Somow first congratulated the Somali people, wherever they may be, on the "momentous" election of the President. He called on groups still opposed to the government of national unity (GNU) to take part in the reconstruction of Somalia and promotion of peace. He called on groups engaging in armed conflict in Somalia, many with the objective of having the country ruled by Islamic law, to join the peace process and abide by the wishes of the majority.

¶3. (SBU) The internal administration of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), resolved to support the new President in order to restore peace and order in the country. They urged Sheikh Sharif to implement Sharia law and form a national armed force to restore peace. Speaking to BBC Somalia Service, the head of the Courts' international administration, Sheikh Abdiqadir Ali Omar, said his group was fully behind the new president and any past differences would take second place to furthering the interests of the country. Omar noted that with the election of Sharif and the departure of the Ethiopian troops, Somalis should "forget the past and consider the general good."

¶4. (SBU) In Mogadishu, residents from various neighborhoods took to the streets in celebration of Sharif's election. Elders from the predominant Hawiye clan welcomed the results of the Djibouti elections and promised to work with the new president. Abukar Osman Sheikh, a Hawiye/Habargidir sub-clan elder, urged the new president to reach out to all armed groups in order to achieve proper reconciliation among all Somalis. In central Mudug region, clan elders and intellectuals welcomed the election of the new president with demonstrations in support of Shairf in several towns, including Beledweyne, Bula Burte and Chalalaqsi. In Beledweyne, capital of Hiraan Region, the head of local administration, Sheikh Abdirahman Ibrahim Maow, urged the residents to observe law and order and help the new government to restore peace. In central Galagadud Region, elders and intellectuals welcomed Sharif's victory and urged the president to help the displaced people to return to their homes. In Galkacyo, the local administration pledged to work closely with the new president.

¶5. (SBU) In a departure from their standard practice, radio stations in Mogadishu have resolved to stop broadcasting religious lectures and sermons conducted in mosques. The decision was meant to marginalize radical views that would create a hostile political environment for the new regime. In a meeting attended by radio directors from mainstream stations in Mogadishu, the media resolved to work towards enhancing peace by not publicizing incidents of violence in Mogadishu, especially those which target the presidency and the airport, with the goal of denying Al-Shabaab and other violent groups publicity.

Negative Reactions:

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Islamists Still
Won't Participate

¶6. (SBU) A variety of naysayers quickly made their way into the public eye following Sharif's election. The Islamic administration of the southern port city of Kismayo expressed strong opposition to the new leadership. In a joint press statement in Kismayo, the deputy head of the city's administration, Abdighani Mohamed Yusuf, and Information Department head Sheikh Hasan Yaqub said the newly-formed government was not different from the regime that had been constituted in Kenya in 2004. Asmara-based rival and leader of the Asmara faction of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) Sheikh Hasan Dahir Aweys described Sharif's presidency as "a chair with no legs." Speaking to Al-Jazeera, Aweys said electing Sharif as the President of Somalia was of no significance to him and his alliance. He said the conflict between him and Sharif was not about his election but was a matter of principle.

¶7. (SBU) Former TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf, speaking to Al-Arabiya TV from Yemen, said Sharif would not be able to bring any changes to Somalia because of the increasing influence of Al-Qaeda affiliates. Yusuf said international recognition alone would not be enough for Sharif to bring stability. Al-Shabaab spokesman Sheikh Mukhtar Robow reportedly said Shabaab would not recognize Sharif's election but would continue its violent effort to establish an Islamic state in Somalia. (Comment: Contrary to media reports, our contacts in Baidoa say Robow has not yet commented on the election but that his subordinates have expressed their opposition to the new government. End comment.)

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Somaliawatchers@state.sgov.gov.

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